

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2648
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USINT BAGHDAD
DIA WASHDC
SECDEF
USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2355

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SY
SUBJECT: RECENT SECURITY/SOCIAL REGULATIONS AND THE NEW CLASS

1. SUMMARY: SECURITY AUTHORITIES RECENTLY BANNED US OF MOTOR-
CYCLES IN MAJOR SYRIAN CITIES IN RESPONSE TO SERIES OF
ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS INVOLVING ASSAILANTS DRIVING CYCLES.
REGULATION HAS ADDED TO ECONOMIC-INDUCED FRUSTRATIONS OF
LOWER CLASS. CONCURRENTLY, NEW SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS AIMED
AT HINDERING RELAXED SOCIALIZING BETWEEN YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN
UNDER 18 REFLECT DESIRE OF SYRIANS WITH MORE TRADITIONAL
ORIENTATION TO BLUNT SOCIAL IMPACT OF OPEN LIFESTYLE
PIONEERED BY NEW PRIVILEGED CLASS. END SUMMARY.

2. MARCH 27 AL-BAATH PUBLISHED ANNOUNCEMENT BY MINISTRY OF
INTERIOR PROHIBITING MOTORCYCLES FROM ENTERING CENTERS OF
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DAMASCUS, HOMS, HAMA, ALEPPO, LATAKIA AND TARTUS EFFECTIVE
APRIL 1. AMMOUNCMENT NOTED THAT MEMBERS OF ARMY,
MILITARY POLICE, INTERNAL SECURITY UNITS AND SOME GOVT
OFFICES (SUCH AT PTT) WERE GRANTED EXCEPTIONS TO
REGULATION.

3. PUBLICATION OF THIS REGULATION WAS ACCOMPANIED BY

REPORTS THAT NEW SOCIAL REGULATIONS WERE CONCURRENTLY PUT INTO FORCE BY SARG. ACCORDING TO VARIOUS SOURCES, COVERING ONE'S FACE WITH BEARDS OR KAFFIYAHS AND WEARING OF SUNGLASSES AT NIGHT HAVE BEEN BANNED IN MAJOR CITIES IN EFFORT TO PREVENT FURTHER ASSASSINATIONS OR AT LEAST AID SECURITY SERVICES IN CAPTURING CRIMINALS. REGIME HAS ALSO RECENTLY PROMULGATED SERIES OF DECREES AFFECTING YOUTH UNDER 18 AIMED AT HINDERING EASY FRATERNIZATION OF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN. REGULATIONS PROHIBITING THEM FROM ENJOYING VARIOUS FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT WITHOUT PRESENCE OF PARENT WERE RECENTLY DISTRIBUTED AT DAMASCUS SCHOOLS. LIST OF FORBIDDEN ACTIVITIES INCLUDES SUCH THINGS AS DATING AT LOCAL CINEMAS, PATRONIZING SNACK BARS, AND WALKING TOGETHER IN EVENINGS ON LOCAL STREETS.

4. PROMULGATION OF BAN ON MOTORCYCLES IN CITY CENTERS CLEARLY REFLECTS CONCERN OF AUTHORITIES TO HALT FURTHER ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS DIRECTED AT SARG OFFICIALS. SEVERAL RECENT VICTIMS, INCLUDING DAMASCUS UNIVERSITY RECTOR MUHAMMAD AL-FADIL AND FONMIN KHADDAM (WHO MIRACULOUSLY SURVIVED) WERE ATTACKED BY ASSAILANTS ON MOTORCYCLES. OTHER ATTEMPTS AGAINST SARG SECURITY OFFICIALS, WE UNDERSTAND, ALSO INVOLVED ASSAILANTS DRIVING MOTORCYCLES. RUMORS WHICH MOST DAMASCENES APPEAR TO HAVE HEARD ABOUT BEARDS, KAFFIYAHS AND WEARING OF SUNGLASSES PERHAPS REFLECT GUIDELINES WHICH SECURITY AUTHORITIES HAVE RECEIVED TO ASSIST THEM TO SURVEIL INDIVIDUALS WHOSE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND APPAREL MARK THEM AS POTENTIALLY SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS IN INCREASINGLY SECURITY-CONSCIOUS CONFIDENTIAL

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SYRIAN CITIES.

5. UNFORTUNATELY, RESTRICTION OF USE OF MOTORCYCLES IN CITIES COULD NOT HAVE BEEN MORE ILL-TIMED TO ADD TO SYRIAN CLASS FRUSTRATIONS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT APPROXIMATELY 40,000 CYCLES WERE IMPORTED IN RECENT YEARS TO SYRIA. MOST OF THEM WERE PURCHASED BY LOWER AND LOWER-MIDDLE CLASS SYRIANS TO TRANSPORT THEMSELVES TO THEIR JOB LOCATIONS, FOR WHAT TO THEM WAS CONSIDERABLE SUM OF MONEY (APPROXIMATELY \$500). AFTER AL-FADIL ASSASSINATION IN LATE FEBRUARY, SECURITY FORCES IMPOUNDED MANY CYCLES DURING SEARCH FOR KILLERS, AND DECIDED THAT CYCLE OWNERS SHOULD PURCHASE LICENSES. OWNERS COMPLIED, BUT HAVE NOW FOUND THAT AFTER THEIR INVESTMENT IN PURCHASING CYCLES AND LICENSES THEY CAN NO LONGER USE THEM FOR INTENDED PURPOSES. OWNERS ARE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS ALREADY HARD-HIT BY LOCAL ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN AND RISING INFLATION, AND NEW REGULATION HAS CAUSED SOME OWNERS, ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, LITERALLY TO WEEP IN FRUSTRATION.

6. SECOND TYPE OF REGULATIONS APPEAR RESPONSIVE TO CONSERVATIVE BACKLASH TO TENDENCY OF DAMASCUS YOUTH TO FLAUNT TRADITIONAL MORALS OF THEIR ELDERS. WE HAVE NOTICED GROWTH OF STENTIMENT IN FAVOR OF TRADITIONAL VALUES, WHICH SOME ATTRIBUTE TO MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND WHICH HAS TO SOME EXTENT BEEN CHanneLED IN POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS DIRECTION. MANY DAMASCUS YOUTH (AND PERHAPS YOUTH OF OTHER LARGE SYRIAN CITIES) ARE ADOPTING SOCIAL MORES THAT SHOCK THOSE IN AUTHORITY. CRITICS SEEM TO BE FOCUSING ON IMPACT OF NEW PRIVILEGED CLASS AND THEIR OFFSPRING ON URBAN LIFE AT TIME WHEN ECONOMIC PRESSURES CAUSING EXPANSION OF BOTH UPPER AND LOWER CLASSES THROUGH SHRINKAGE OF MIDDLE CLASS AND RELATIVELY HIGH LOCAL INFLATION.

7. COMMENT:MVERSIMPLIFIED ATTEMPT TO IMRPOVE SECURITY SITUATION BY RESTRICTING USE OF MOTORCYCLES HAS
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INCREASED FRUSTRATIONS OF THOSE WHO ALREADY BURDENED BY ECONOMIC PROBLEMS; UNCONFIRMED RUMOR WE HAVE HEARD THAT SARG MAY LIFT RESTRICTION SUGGESTS REGIME AWARE OF DAMAGE CAUSED BY REGULATION. NEW SOCIAL REGULATIONS PROBABLY MAKR ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE REGIME'S CONCERN THAT TRADITIONAL VALUES ESPOUSED BY ITS GENERATION CANNOT BE OPENLY FLAUNTED, AND PRESUMABLY MEET WITH APPROVAL OF CONSERVATIVE MUSLIMS, INCLUDING MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD.
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